

Message Text

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USICA FOR EU DEMITZ FROM HARROD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: CSCE, UR, US
SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION ON PRESS ACCESS

REF: USICA 16852

1. PRIOR TO 1975 HELSINKI MEETING, FOREIGN JOURNALISTS
HERE WERE GENERALLY ABLE TO SECURE FORMAL MEETINGS WITH
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ONLY THROUGH INTERMEDIARY SERVICES
OF MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS PRESS DEPARTMENT OR
NOVOSTI PRESS AGENCY. IN PRACTICE, THIS FREQUENTLY
MEANT LONG DELAYS AND/OR INABILITY TO OBTAIN ACCESS.

2. IN WAKE OF HELSINKI, HOWEVER, SOVIETS CHANGED RULES
GOVERNING ACCREDITED FOREIGN NEWSMEN TO PERMIT DIRECT
ACCESS TO ALL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. IN PRACTICE THIS
HAS LED TO MIXED RESULTS. IT HAS PROBABLY FACILITATED
ROUTINE CONTACTS WITH SOME GOVERNMENT OFFICES USED TO
DEALING WITH FOREIGNERS. BUT IF CORRESPONDENTS WISH TO
INTERVIEW OFFICIAL IN LESS-VISIBLE GOVERNMENT APPARATUS
OR DO NOT KNOW WHOM TO SEEK OUT TO OBTAIN NECESSARY
INFORMATION, CHANGE HAS DEPRIVED NEWSMEN OF ASSISTANCE
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OF MFA. MFA NOW DECLINES TO ASSIST ON PRINCIPLE THAT
NEWSMEN HAVE DIRECT ACCESS AND CAN MAKE THEIR OWN
CONTACTS.

3. SOVIET PRESS CRITICISM OF INDIVIDUAL NEWSMEN HAS
ALSO HAD NOTICEABLE EFFECT ON ABILITY TO SECURE ACCESS.
ONE EXAMPLE: FORMER NEW YORK TIMES BUREAU CHIEF CHRIS
WREN TRIED TO CONTACT MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS SHORTLY AFTER

HE HAD BEEN ATTACKED IN LITERATURNAYA GAZETA. WREN WANTED TO DO INNOCUOUS, EVEN FAVORABLE, STORY ON EFFICIENCY OF SOVIET RAILROAD SYSTEM BUT WHEN HE IDENTIFIED HIMSELF OVER TELEPHONE TO MINISTRY OFFICIAL HE WAS ASKED "ARE YOU THE SAME MAN WE HAVE READ ABOUT?" AND WHEN HE REPLIED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE HE WAS TOLD "WE CAN'T SEE YOU." WHILE PROBABLY THIS WAS SIMPLY INDIVIDUAL REACTION OF FRIGHTENED BUREAUCRAT, IT NEVERTHELESS SHOWS INHIBITING EFFECT OF SOVIET MEDIA CRITICISM.

4. ON PHYSICAL ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, ALL SOVIET GOVERNMENT FACILITIES ARE GUARDED BY UNIFORMED SOVIET MILITIAMEN AND ACCESS IS ONLY BY PASS OR PERSONAL ESCORT PROVIDED BY BUILDING'S OCCUPANTS. IT IS THEREFORE IMPOSSIBLE FOR FOREIGN NEWSMEN TO GAIN ACCESS TO ANY SOVIET GOVERNMENTAL BUILDING WITHOUT PRIOR ARRANGEMENT. THIS INCLUDES RPT INCLUDES SUCH GOVERNMENT MEDIA OUTLETS AS TASS, GOSTELERADIO, PRAVDA AND IZVESTIYA. ACCESS IS EASIER TO OTHER "NON-GOVERNMENTAL" BODIES SUCH AS USA INSTITUTE, LITERATURNAYA GAZETA, NOVOYE VREMYA, ETC, WHERE DOOR IS WATCHED ONLY BY CIVILIAN "DEZHURNAYA" OR "SHVEYTSAR" WHO MAY BE HELPFUL OR UNHELPFUL BUT USUALLY CIRCUMVENTED. MATLOCK

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